

TERM OF OFFICE OF JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

(Mr. ARENDS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ARENDS. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the chairman of our Committee on Armed Services the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. Vinson] introduced a bill—H.R. 6600—to fix the term of office at 4 years for all the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

As ranking minority member of the committee I am today introducing an identical measure. My purpose is to show the unanimity on our committee as to the importance of our Joint Chiefs of Staff, responsible for our military plans and strategy, being able to express independent judgment on military matters without having to be concerned over his reappointment.

Existing law authorizes appointments up to a period of 4 years, except for the Commandant of the Marine Corps who must be appointed for 4 years. By fixing the term at 4 years we will have the benefit of the experience of each senior military member of his service that arises from continuity of service on the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the overall military planning body. We will also better insure against civilian dictation on matters strictly military. With a fixed 4 year term, with no right of reappointment, a Secretary of Defense will be less able to force his will on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and they will be less reluctant to express themselves frankly when so requested by our Committee on Armed Services, as well as our other committees of the Congress.

It must be borne in mind that under the Constitution the primary responsibility for the size, kind, and nature of national defense we shall have invested in the Congress—not in the Secretary of Defense, not even in the President. It is accordingly of primary importance that the Congress be able to obtain from our chief military planners their frank and honest opinions without any coercion or fear of their military future from any Secretary of Defense.

With a fixed 4 year term, it will no longer be possible for a Secretary of Defense to place a "cloud" on a military officer's distinguished career by preventing his reappointment if the senior officer should not endorse the Secretary's views.

Of course, the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff can at any time be replaced by the President. They are at his pleasure. This is as it should be. He is Commander in Chief. Any such action as replacement by the President would inevitably be subject to the most scrupulous scrutiny by the Congress. The reasons for the replacement will be more or less automatically brought before the Senate when the Senate has before it the question of confirmation of the President's appointee of the President.

I believe this proposed legislation will give our National Security Council and our Joint Chiefs of Staff a more

independent body of our best military minds on whose judgment we should rely if we are to maintain national defense superiority. Of course, no law will be satisfactory unless it is administered in accordance with the intent of Congress. I am not at all sure the present Secretary of Defense cares what Congress intends. He and his civilian aids presume to know all the answers, military as well as economic.